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USA flexes muscle at Libya

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USA warplanes have mounted a new challenge to Libyan leader Muammar Khadafy — and the Soviet missiles now poised on Libya's coast.

Navy planes took off at 7 p.m. EST Thursday from two carriers north of Libya to launch the USA's week-long show of force in defiance of Soviet and Libyan threats.

The White House, Pentagon and State Department called the operation "just routine," but it marked another escalation in the USA's campaign to curb Soviet-backed Libya and stop terrorism.

"We're showing the U.S. resolve to continue to operate in international water or air space no matter who may be screaming and shouting about it," said Navy spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Robert Prucha.

That remark was aimed at Khadafy's claim to control all the Gulf of Sidra beyond the 12-mile limit recognized by the USA. Navy F-14 Tomcats shot down two Libyan planes over the gulf in 1981.

"Nothing provocative about this," White House spokesman Ed Djerejian said. "We have no intention of thumbing our noses at Khadafy."

Reagan also has ordered more money for development of a CIA covert operation against Khadafy, according to published reports today.

A "We got his number," Vice President George Bush said about Khadafy in a New York speech Thursday. "We know he's a liar ... with the blood of an 11-year-old girl on his hands, a pretty little American girl" killed in a recent terror attack at the Rome airport.

The Pentagon has notified Mediterranean countries that Navy planes plan to crisscross the area until Jan. 31.

FAA spokesman John Leyden said the operation did not endanger civilian planes.